(you know i can see) what you really are

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(you know i can see) what you really are

by HelpfulHardware

Summary

Metal Sonic was one of Eggman's most powerful and respected creations... but if that was the case, why was he tossed around like nothing when he lost?

Why is he hurting? And why does that *copy* want to help him?

Notes

:sob:

bigs ups to blaine and lime for helping beta this thing! title from nine inch nails "ruiner".

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Metal was the cold, dull plating that lined the mad doctor's airship. *Metal* walked along those sheets of steel, after yet another failed attempt to assert himself as the real Sonic by beating that annoying organic to a pulp. Yet, his failure wasn't what he was thinking about at this moment. Rather, it was how he was reminded of it. Eggman has always been a man that expected *perfection* from his work. His plans, his machines, himself. Anything less needed to be rectified and if necessary, replaced in order to finally put that rodent out of his misery. Given Sonic's track record of successfully tearing through his badniks and attempts at world domination, it's no surprise that the doctor gets frustrated at his creations fairly frequently.

Metal Sonic has gotten the brunt of his anger the most out of all of Eggman's creations. The reason has not quite been clear. It might be the fact that the bot was built to resemble the "copy" that was meant to be destroyed, or possibly something relating to how long he has been online, even through the many changes required for his continual functioning. Whatever the case, the self-proclaimed genius often berated the "bucket of bolts" for failing to subdue his inferior. Threats to disassemble and melt to scrap are made, but never followed upon. Occasionally the robot would be kicked and thrown around, accompanied by grunts of anger. Each event ends the same however, with Metal being told to return to his chambers and await further instruction.

Memories of every moment he is online are stored on a hyper-dense chip in his 'skull', the explanation being so he can learn from the hedgehog's behavior, and from his own mistakes. This seemed to also include the doctor's ranting and fury. The words. The disappointment. The damage. The dents that he left have since been buffed out, removed and replaced with newer parts. But the memories, the (for lack of a better word) *feelings* that came from those attacks stubbornly refused to be deleted. Metal felt *hurt*. The fact that he felt at all was strange. Why could he even feel to begin with? It's not necessary for besting and subduing his enemy, so why was that functionality implemented in him? And why was he only thinking of this now, after having to undergo that abuse for at least ten time–

Metal felt his circuits jump. That word. *Abuse*. That wasn't the right word for what he did, was it? His onboard dictionary had multiple definitions for the word, with the last two reading as follows:

"Def. 3: language that condemns or vilifies usually unjustly, intemperately, and angrily."

"Def. 4: physical maltreatment."

After re-evaluating the records he had, he felt startled by the only logical conclusion: Both definitions perfectly apply to what he did. Eggman abused Metal Sonic, and continues to do so.

This could not be right. It couldn't be. Eggman was purportedly the most perfect person on Mobius and yet, the logic was sound. Everything matched up. Everything hurt. He shouldn't be hurting. He shouldn't be *here*. Leaving the airship would constitute a violation of the old man's orders, and of the principle that he remain loyal to the Eggman Empire, but it didn't feel right to remain. The metal walls surrounding the badnik felt closer than before, suffocating almost. A visual malfunction, something Eggman could fix but *damnit* he can't be near him right now. Before anything else could interrupt his processes, Metal ran straight (more or less) down the hall to a partially opened overhead door in the loading bay, and let himself fall out to who knows where. Who cares, even? Metal didn't care, and really didn't have time to before a sharp collision with the earth below made his systems stop.

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Visual sensors come back online. The first image? A wide expanse of dark indigo hues, blended together to serve as the backdrop for all the lights from beyond. At our vantage point, they look like nothing more than pearl white dots shimmering as they crawl across the night sky. Metal Sonic has evidently landed on his back. Control over his motors and servos slowly fades in. His stainless steel claws dig into the earth below him, grasping clumps of dirt and grass as he tries to push his upper half to a sitting position. With that accomplished, the bot can see his surroundings properly. Ahead lay a forest filled with what seemed to be a variety of oak and hickory trees. Common in temperate climates. Behind him he observes a hilly grass-laden expanse. As the badnik tries to ascertain where on Mobius he may have landed, and how to get back to Eggman's base… his prior thoughts return to working memory.

Metal still didn't want to go back to him, of course. Never mind that it was a direct violation of his loyalty to the man, and that the last time he tried to ditch him was when that chunk of his memories were removed entirely. What even happened then? Was it for the same reasons that he left the airship today? It was, wasn't it. There wasn't any other explanation, at least not that he could think of at the moment. The thoughts of that scared Metal, yet they shouldn't! The only scary thing here should be the way he'll finally prove his superiority over–

That inferior copy ran by just then, with the typical glowing blue trace following in his wake. Of *course* he decides to show up. Think of the devil and he may appear. Although, this might not be too bad. If anything, it's the perfect opportunity to take his mind off of all of those memories, at least for a while. Besides, when has Metal ever turned down the chance to fight against Sonic? Well there may have been one time before that he was forced to–OK don't think about that now, just go. Just get to your feet and use that jet engine of yours to get him. He followed that vague memory of the trail his clone left for about half a mile, right until said clone collided with him.

The spin attack sent the bot tumbling backwards, his chassis skidding through the dirt and uprooting some grasses and small flowers. Great, more scuffs and dirt that need to be addressed later.

"Woah.. back already, Metal?"

…but not before the blue menace that just sneered at him is dealt with. Metal removes his head from the earth that obscured his vision, and turns it to look at his long-time enemy. Sure enough, Sonic looks the same as he always had. Smug smirk and cocky attitude included. Before the badnik could interject with a perfectly demeaning "greeting", the organic hedgehog had a bit more of his spiel to get through.

"I'm kinda surprised. Didn't expect the ol' Eggster to fix you up *that* fast!"

A spasm.

For whatever reason, the mention of his… creator's… name made Metal's whole frame shake. It never happened before, so why now? Whatever the reason, Sonic didn't seem to think it was that big of a deal. "Although, he probably didn't do a perfect job."

Another spasm. No. It was all from that name. The name of the man

who called him “one of my finest creations”, yet kicked him around like he was nothing when he failed. He may as well be nothing.

[Stop. Talking.]

“...and start fighting? Alright then, I’ll send you packing right back to him in no ti–”

Another spasm. Far too much. It needed to stop.

[STOP. STOP. **STOP.**]

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Late night runs have always been a routine Sonic partook in. A solid way to burn off that last bit of adrenaline before bed, and well, they’ve just been enjoyable regardless. Whether he spends the time taking in the sights of the night sky or feeling the usual wind in his quills, or whether he’s having a good old-fashioned race or fight with one of his many rivals. He didn’t quite expect a meeting with Metal turning out like *this*, though. The robotic double had just been defeated the day prior, in one of Eggman’s more minor schemes in between the ones where he vies for world domination. Seeing him back so soon was one thing, but the way he’s behaving now is downright strange. Sonic is quick to voice that. “Okay, I’ve never seen you acting like this before. Another one of Eggman’s weir–”

A startling screeching noise emanated from Metal’s vocal synthesizer, catching the blue blur completely off guard and making his fur stand on end. If he had to guess, Sonic might say that harsh tone was out of anger and… possibly distress? Something told him now that this probably wasn’t one of the doctor’s weird plots. The noise eventually stopped, with the source of it visibly trembling on his knees. For a moment, maybe two, Sonic was stunned into silence. His ears, which have flopped downward once the noise began, currently remain in that position. The hedgehog has always been one to help others in need, including villains in some cases. Right now, he *knew* he had to help Metal Sonic, but couldn’t really think of a way how. Just then, as if responding to an unasked “what’s wrong”, the badnik began to speak, with the pitch of his words being as shaky as the rest of him was.

[He… hurt me. I am not supposed to feel hurt, yet I do. I am the most superior badnik, yet he hurts me still. I am forced to remember. I do not want to. I want to forget. I want to forget. I want to forget. I want to–]

Metal was brought out of that loop when his copy called his name. No longer fixated on that impossible desire, he was able to sit up and focus on his surroundings for a moment. Sonic knelt on the ground next to the robot, ears drooping, and a look of deep concern in his eyes. It was wrong. It felt so wrong. He should not be cared about, especially not by that inferior pest! Yet… he wanted it to end. He wanted his thoughts to stop. He didn't want help. He did want help. He doesn't know anymore. His chips feel strained.

"Metal… What did he even *do* to you?"

A silence falls over the moonlit fields. Both Sonics turn their heads earthward, but neither say a word. After a brief time, Sonic thinks he hears something moving through the grass. His ears slightly perk up as he looks around, failing to find another figure standing anywhere nearby. That quiet sound plays again, and the hedgehog manages to place it coming from… Metal? He sat on the ground hugging his knees. Must've been him shuffling around, right? Another burst of noise and sure enough, it's actually from his vocal synthesizer. It sounded strangely like the static noise from Tails' radio equipment, but modified. The volume goes up slightly, and then stops. But it plays again, sounding lower each time, again and again, then going back to its original pitch. The bursts also came in a peculiar rhythm, sounding slightly farther apart as it goes before going back to repeat again. Come to think of it, they almost resembled–

…

Oh.

Oh no.

Metal Sonic… is *crying*.

…

Sonic's not been the *best* at comforting others in situations like this. Hell, he can barely comfort himself at his lowest moments (not that anyone's supposed to know about that). Still, the badnik is hurting. Like, *actually* hurting. Someone's gotta be there for him. Sonic reaches out to put a comforting hand on his shoulder…

…only for Metal to flinch at the touch and back away a few inches, staring at his mobian counterpart for a second before looking back inward and resuming his computerized sobs. Right. This is Metal Sonic, the bot built to replace his organic basis. Of course he wouldn't

be so willing to accept help from his lifelong rival. But… Sonic had to do *something*! He couldn't just leave anyone like this, in crisis and so far from–

Home. Metal's was with Eggman. He'd be looking for the bot that rebelled for a second time. The pit in Sonic's stomach grew a bit deeper just then. There is no way the hedgehog would ever let the doctor get to Metal. Not after what he's seen.

The robot's sobs continued on. It pained Sonic that he couldn't do anything in the moment to help, but he still had an idea on something that could be done. He whipped out his phone from his quills, and dialed in the number of someone who should be in bed right now, but is too hyperfixated on his work to notice. It only took two rings for the other line to pick up, and only a second after that for the brotherly teasing to begin.

"Hey Tails! How's *staying up past your bedtime* going for ya?"

"Sonic… I was in the middle of working on a new invention!"

"Well healthy sleeping habits are more important, lil' bro."

"Says the one who's *also* still awake."

Sonic could just *hear* the smirk coming from the other end.

"Yeah, yeah… anyway could that be put on hold for just a second? Something kinda important came up."

"What is it?"

"I'll explain later. Meet me at my coordinates. Oh, and bring some of your tools just in case."

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It only took about ten minutes after the call ended for the flying fox to arrive, his 'natural propeller' of sorts slowing as he landed on the ground to meet his big brother. It also didn't take long for Tails to question what he was doing with Metal Sonic (the murder bot was in sleep mode and technically not a threat at the moment, but still). Sonic took some time to explain what Metal had gone through, but for the kit it just seemed too outrageous to believe.

"You remember the last time he was free of Eggman's control? He

copied all our bio-data and tried to kill us all!”

“Tails, I promise he’s not going to hurt me, or anyone else like that. He needs help, and I don't wanna leave him here like this.”

The banter and bickering between the two mobians carried on, the inventor incredulous at the idea that Metal was actually feeling mental pain. Sonic, however, was not intending to budge. Eventually though, Tails relented.

“Fine. I'll let him stay with us for a while, on the condition that I inspect him here and remove anything that links him to Eggman. Deal?”

“Deal.”

The fox couldn’t work as fast as he would’ve liked, all of his more efficient tools were at the workshop and Tails was not really keen on potentially letting the mad doctor know where he and Sonic lived. But, his Miles Electric and the assortment of other tools he brought were just enough to do some digging around. First came looking to see if there were any tracking devices onboard, which there was one that was trivial to remove. Next came any software tracking, or any code that connected to EggNet in any way. Trying to crack the security on Metal’s code was time-consuming, but doable still. Once inside, Tails noticed how easy it was to access the robot’s memories, and how adamant Sonic was that they weren’t tampered with in any way. The thought hadn’t come to mind beforehand, but whatever. The kit could theoretically come back to them later anyhow. The programs that could give away Metal’s location were more pertinent. Those, and other apps that link with EggNet were removed.

All in all, the whole ordeal took a bit over an hour to finish. But, everything had been taken care of. If it lasted any longer, Tails would’ve face planted into the robot that was now EggNet-free. Thank Gaia, he thought as he disconnected his tablet from Metal. He would have then told Sonic that he’s ready to go, if it weren’t for the badnik springing to life and startling him.

[Sir, I already know how I failed.]

“W-what just happened?”

Sonic didn't have an answer, he only looked at Metal with a mixture of surprise and worry on his face. Evidently, neither of the brothers knew why he awoke.

[Subpar performance acknowledged. You do not need to repeat your statement.]

Statements like this, they weren't directed at the two, but someone else. Someone that neither Sonic nor Tails could see, but someone that the robot was seemingly *terrified* of, as evident from the way he steadily backed himself away from the two and up against a tree. The hedgehog seemed to know what this was, as he tried desperately and quickly to get his clone's attention. "Metal, listen to me–"

[I understand. Your actions are unnecessary. YOUR ACTIONS ARE UNNECESSARY.]

"METAL!!"

Blink. The LED "eyes" that Metal had covered with his arms blinked a few more times, slightly moving around as he (hopefully) was realizing where he really was. From a distance, Tails watches in pure shock at what had just unfolded, and remains frozen while his brother tries to ground his double.

"Metal, it's okay. You're not there, you're with me. You're here. You're safe."

A moment or two pass by, as Metal glances at his nearby surroundings. Although it doesn't take long for him to then hug his knees up against his chest and sob. The fox slowly walks over, realizing 1. that Sonic was telling the truth and not being duped, and 2. sweet Chaos what even happened to make the badnik behave like *this*? He didn't know, and he wasn't sure if he even wanted to know right now. All he can do is join Sonic in giving Metal some company as he cries and cries. Tails sits down on the other side of the bot from his brother, letting his namesakes lay against its chassis. Said brother is whispering words of comfort and reassurance, that sadly may not be doing as much as he hoped. Regardless, the two organics come to agree on one thing: Metal Sonic needs help, and a lot of it. The two vow to each other as they carry the bot to their workshop later that night, that they'd try the best they could to make him feel better. Sonic specifically though, he vows to himself to get answers later from the man who thought it OK to abuse his creation.

Chapter End Notes

> them's the angst, pal. dunno if ill make this a multichap thing or not but hope yall enjoyed regardless :)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

yep, its multichap time! heres another for ya

One thing at a time. One step at a time, as the brothers walk with Metal Sonic towards their rustic workshop and home. The bot had to be calmed down enough to actually make the trip, but thankfully that wasn't too difficult. Surprisingly, it didn't take much convincing for Metal to agree to hunkering down there. Then again, he was likely too drained to question it. All three of those walking worn paths in the Mystic Ruins were feeling out of it, quite frankly. Too tired to think, to address the implications of what happened on this otherwise rather gentle spring night. No one spoke during the travel, an air of unease enveloping the mobians who felt a pit in their stomachs. Metal didn't feel right either, and that had them all worried.

The three eventually clambered to the cliffside complex that they all called 'home'. For two it was their more-or-less permanent settlement. For the other… Well to put it one way, it sure as hell beats the alternative. That said, he was *Metal Sonic* , and he wasn't going to just befriend his lifelong enemies like this. This was only a temporary arrangement for his own safety. Nothing more. It wasn't meant to be anything more.
…or was it? A sort of mental fog came over the bot, it was hard for him to even think about what he wanted. Did he want their care? Did he not want their help? Should he even stay here, or was it only right to return and be thrashed around like the miserable TRAITOROUS PIECE OF SH–

"Metal? The door's open. You coming in or what?"

A blink. Then a few more. This was what, the third time that the badnik got lost in internal threads of thought like this? Sure enough in reality, he was standing right outside while the fox was holding the workshop door open, letting warm air flow into the wider atmosphere. Tails looked expectantly at Metal, concern and slight annoyance crossing his face. Right. Perhaps it would be a good idea to pay attention to the people who bothered to give him shelter. The bot walked on through, with the child following behind before shutting the door.

The interior was a modestly spacious hangar and workspace, with

Tails' own biplane occupying a big chunk of it all at the moment. With the three tired beings now inside, it was now a matter of sorting out a sleep arrangement for Metal Sonic. That matter was one that his organic counterpart elected to solve. "Alright. You could sleep with me in my room or–"

Metal promptly turned his gaze down and away while crossing his arms. "Oookay then. Guess you're staying in here tonight." With that 'settled', Sonic turned his attention to the only other mobian in the building. "...if that's alright with you, Tails?"

He only had the energy to shrug. With a sigh, his older brother stepped down on one knee to meet the fox's gaze.

"Get some *sleep* this time, okay?"

"Okay…"

"Love you, little bro."

Metal could only observe the scene before him: the gentle embrace and the "love yous", the interaction completely foreign and befuddling. Not just because of the bot's exhausted CPU, though that certainly didn't help. It was over in a moment regardless, and the "real" hedgehog left the exchange to go up the stairwell just nearby, presumably to go to his own bedroom. He went up only a few steps before turning his head back the other way. "You get some rest too, 'Metal Me'..."

The robot still wasn't able to speak at that time, although Sonic probably didn't expect a response anyhow. All the organic returned was a solemn smile before he turned and ascended the rest of the way. Some… some sort of feeling arose in Metal with that smile. A feeling that he instinctively wanted to grab and hold onto for dear life. A feeling that was hard to put into words (even if he actually could right then). A feeling that felt right… and yet so *wrong* somehow coming from Sonic. Was it just because it came from his rival? Or was there something more? Before he could even attempt to process any of this, an interrupt came in the form of a kitsune deciding to speak up.

"You can park yourself wherever you want, just don't mess with anything I'm working on." A simple instruction delivered in a somewhat aloof tone. Admittedly it was a bit tempting to disobey, wreck everything and take Tails as a hostage, but Metal would be kidding himself if he said he actually had the energy to even do it. Besides, it didn't feel right. Nothing had ever felt right for the past few

hours, and that scared him. The bot let himself sit on an upturned crate nearby, a simple task not requiring much work or thought. Thoughts were too hard. Everything was just so hard. He needed a break, a moment or two to decompress and make sense of things. Visual sensors go offline to free up memory space, and it didn't take long after that for some core processing threads to be terminated, and for Metal to fall into a 'sleep' state.

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Clink clank. The only sounds that could be heard were the clanking of Metal Sonic's "shoes" against the floor, and the rapid footsteps of his inferior copy from behind. He was running. Running toward something? The only thing that could be seen was… nothing. Just a pitch black void of nothingness stretching out for infinity. He was making distance, but not for the purpose of reaching somewhere. Running from something? Or rather, *someone*. Metal took a glance backward as he kept his pace. Sonic stared back at him, his green eyed gaze showing some sort of determination. It felt strange. Ideally Sonic should be the one running away, not him! He should stop for a moment, throw him off, change direction, *get closer–*

However, a voice as strong as that one told him to keep going. Keep running. Don't let up. Don't be weak. Don't fail *him*. Metal faltered for a split second, allowing his double to start closing the gap between them. By now, they were about a meter apart. Not good. Good. You're letting him down. You don't want him. You're a failure. You've never had a chance to succeed. Let him get you. Keep him away. Reach for him. Push him away. You hate him. You need him. You can't think. You can't think. You stumble and fall. You let him get closer. You curl yourself up. They look at you. The hammer comes down.

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Awareness comes up rather suddenly for Metal. Perhaps it was too sudden though, for in the midst of the panic, distress, and confusion, he let his body tilt forward. Falling off the crate, and collapsing with a clatter on the cold hangar floor. A floor that he could actually see. Now there's something to reassure the badnik that he wasn't dreaming. Alas, this sudden commotion did not go unnoticed. In the corner of Metal's vision, he could just about see a young fox that was previously nodding off with his head on his work desk. Said fox was startled wide awake, frantically looking around for where the hell that noise came from.

Tails and his namesakes relaxed with a sigh of slight relief upon seeing that no, it wasn't an Eggman robot that had just intruded or one of his projects spontaneously combusting (the latter may or may not have happened before, though he won't ever tell). Anyhow he rushed over, with Miles Electric in hand, over to the robot which had rather disgracefully landed on hard concrete. He rotated the robot back to a more fitting sitting position, on the floor this time. Questions were raised, the typical wanting to make sure the other was okay, but they were never answered. It's not like Metal was incapable of answering this time, it's just that the fox was thinking and talking *so fast* that even if the robot in his confused state did manage to get a word out, it probably wouldn't have even been processed by the kit who was now using his tablet to scan for anything wrong.

The results? Only minor dents on the body and head. Nothing major. Nothing to worry about. With that, Tails managed to finally take a longer breath, and he let himself slump against the same crate Metal fell from as the adrenaline started to dissipate. Nervous chuckling escaped his mouth. "N-next time, maybe find a more stable place to sleep?" The bot simply rolled his eyes. Within some moments the laughs had stopped, their rhythms had slowed, and both beings found themselves in a strange sort of calm. A dare I say, peaceful few minutes went by like this: the two absent-mindedly gazing at nothing in particular, occasionally making eye contact only for the artificial form to break it soon after.

One object in the wide space managed to catch his attention though. That tablet, the same one he saw the fox with the last time he… woke up. The screen was dimmed, as if it were to go into a sleep mode of its own, but Metal could just barely make out the information displayed: specifications about himself, his construction, his codebase. And an alarm went off in his mind. [You had access to my code.]

"Huh?" The fox looked to stare back at the robot that for the first time in the entire night, was now holding eye contact. However, it was evidently not for a 'happy' reason.

[What did you do with my code?]

Tails attempted to wave that concern away. "Relax, I didn't mess with your personality or anything. I just took out your onboard tracker and other bits of code that connected you to Eggman's stuff."

The arm that Metal was leaning on slightly shook with those last words, nearly sending his head to the pavement again.

“Ah… right…”

The fox’s features slumped a bit further, while the badnik did an internal scan on his filesystem. Sure enough, he was right. The only things changed were tracking and communications, all other programs were left untouched.

Another silence came over the two. Neither paid attention to how long it lasted exactly, all Metal knew was this was nearly two hours after he first drifted to sleep in a quite frankly ridiculous position. The other ‘Sonic’ would probably get a kick out of hearing about that.

[In other circumstances,] he broke the silence, more talking to himself than anyone else. [I would have reduced you, that copy, and this whole building to ashes by now.]

“Yet you're staying here.”

[This arrangement is more… preferable for my needs at the moment.]

…

Eventually, Tails stood up and slowly made his way to that stairwell. A heavy sigh left him. “I'm sorry that he–”

[Do not speak of it. Not now.]

Still a sore subject, sadly. “...Understood.” The fox disappeared round a corner, creaking wood continually decreasing in volume… into silence. The cool air that flowed through the workshop was even more noticeable now. Yet again, Metal was left with his thoughts. Metal was alone.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Metal had been alone before, plenty of times in fact. He was alone in his chambers awaiting the next chance to beat his inferior. He was alone in stealth missions. He was alone scouting ahead. He was alone out of sight, waiting for the right opportunity to strike. He was alone (presumably) the last time he rebelled from his… well, the last time he rebelled. He was alone now, as cold post-midnight air blew and was felt by the multitude of sensors in his chassis. Metal was used to being alone, so why? Why did this time feel so different? It's illogical, the bot knew. He shouldn't be having so much trouble with the thought of being alone now! He could do this.

After all, he didn't pride himself on being superior to the other badniks for nothing! The times where Sonic bested him were mere flukes, he was sure! He CAN do this! He was determined! Fearless! Strong! Resourceful and clever! He was the kind of killer robot whose creator would be proud of him!

…But yet, he wasn't. He was disgraced. Broken. Afraid. Abused. He wasn't respected at all. He was a tool to be used for someone else's gain, and to be forcefully bent into shape when he inevitably failed. He was the kind of robot who was now clutching his skull, feeling emotions that *he shouldn't feel.* He hated it. He hated such a demeaning existence. He hated not having someone who appreciated his greatness. He hated being alone. He can't be alone. He can't be alone.

Metal's thoughts were accelerating in frequency, and so too was the rate at which the walls inched closer to him. Wait, when did that start happening? Was this just another visual malfunction, like the one he had back on the airship? Thinking about the airship, about *that man* made things worse, overclocking his systems. It was far too much to bear. He needed to leave, needed to LEAVE **NOW!**

The robot scrambled to his feet and raced towards the only possible exit, that stairwell. He still felt uneasy about being in neutral company with the two that had ascended it before, but that was the *least* of his priorities at the moment. What was a priority was getting up those Gaia-forsaken stairs. Even just crawling up them was difficult, what

with his rapid thinking and distorted vision. Both of those could be a fair guess from any outsider as to what's going on; all it takes is one look at his optical display and his "eyes" which have been reduced to thin red circles. Creaking wood combined with the sound of metal scraping against, as his limbs had a harder time grabbing hold of the next step every time. But he had to keep going, he had to go GET OUT–

Metal made it to the top of the stairs, by way of accidentally sending his body colliding with the ceiling and pitifully crashing back down to the floor below. More physical bruises to add along the mental ones. The bot lifted himself up a bit to look into his new surroundings. Things weren't as shaky now (that physical shock might have had something to do with it), and he could see…

A typical living room. A light green tessellating pattern coated the walls, matching with the dark wooden flooring. Probably mahogany. The typical amenities were there too. A rather reflective flatscreen TV sat on top of an entertainment center which had the usual mix of discs and consoles. Opposite it were a modest table and some cushioned seats. The back of the couch in particular had minor depressions, presumably from where two people sat here. Lived here. Other little details supported this too, like photos of their adventures hanging on the walls, a loose disc of one of those 'Chao in Space' movies laying on the table, and a drawing attached to a fridge in the adjacent open kitchen, presumably drawn at a very young age. The signature in the corner read "TAILS", but with the S written backwards.

This was evidently a place that the hedgehog and fox lived in. Their *home.* It certainly looked a lot more according to the regular examples of a home than… where he spent his days before. Why couldn't he have something like this? Why wasn't he–

"And what are *you* still doing up?"

Ah. One of the people who lived here happened to be still awake. That person of course being the blue hedgehog that Metal was modeled after, who happened to unintentionally make him jump back a bit. The robotic double had also expected the mobian to be sleeping at this time, but never mind that. Right now, what he needed was a plausible excuse to be standing around in his (usually) enemy's living space.

[Examining my new surroundings.]

Okay, maybe that could have been a bit better. And if Metal could see

through his own flimsy response, then… “Can’t that wait until you can see things better?”

This was ridiculous. A waste of time. [Do not question my reasoning, meatbag,] the robot uttered as he slowly made his way back towards those stairs. Sonic was right, wasn’t he. What would he even serve to gain from just loitering in the middle of-

“Are you up cause you’re scared of a nightmare or something?”

He stops mid-stride. That hedgehog, he’s so perceptive, so… *caring.*

“Dude… you could just sleep with me. That’s what Tails did when he had trouble sleeping.”

Metal turns his head back to glare at his organic counterpart. The bot had thought it best that Sonic not butt into places where he shouldn’t be involved.

[I would like to *avoid* being close to you unless it’s for eviscerating your head.]

“Too bad that’s not happening. You're gonna be stuck with Tails and I until we know the doc isn’t–”

Another spasm.

“Oh, right… Sorry…”

These were starting to get old really quick. He shouldn’t be like this, inching closer to a mental breakdown everytime he hears a reference to *him,* or his gaia-damned name. He shouldn’t be having the equivalent of a panic attack when he’s on his own. He hates it. He hates the whole package of feelings that have been unleashed since that realization, an event that makes him almost curse his own synthetic intellect. And here he is looking at his notorious adversary, actually considering accepting *help* from that blue rat. Was it worth it? Deep down, he had always hated that hedgehog and everything he stood for. Would it really be the best idea to set all that aside? Just this once?

Metal took one look back at the stairwell… and made up his mind.

“Wait, what are you…” Sonic questioned as his robotic double walked past him, and toward the hall from whence he came.

[Think nothing of this, pest,] the badnik said with a short glance before making his way through the door ahead of him. If he had held his gaze for a moment or two more however, he would've noticed as a light smirk crept across Sonic's face.

The bedroom was very much suitable for someone like that hedgehog. Fairly clean, as Sonic didn't spend too much time here, but it was still decorated with loads of photos and trinkets gathered from the many adventures he's been on. The most striking thing about his room was the bed, the frame of which took on a disguise reminiscent of a high speed race car. Childish, of course, but Metal supposed it fit with the organic's "theme" as it were. Besides, it's not like the bot was in a position or mood to poke fun like this.

Sonic walks past him and gestures towards said bed, a way of asking if he'd like to lay next to the blue blur. The bot instead walks his back against the wall opposite from the door, and lets his cold frame slump to the floor. The hedgehog in response lets his arms fall down to his sides, his features turning solemn as he moves to tuck himself in. For moments only silence could be heard, accented by the muffled sound of rain beginning to pour in outside. This would be interrupted soon because of one question. Something that has been bugging Metal Sonic ever since he was first found hours ago.

[Why?]

"Hm?"

[Why are you offering to help me?]

Sonic sat up on his mattress, and his robot double slowly stood to meet his gaze.

"It's pretty simple honestly. I see a person in need of help, and I do the best I can to do just that. Wherever the wind takes me, wherever I find people."

Metal slowly sauntered to the side of the bed, while Sonic carried on with his softer tone. This sensitivity… it's not anything the bot had seen of him before.

"And that includes you too."

[But why *me?* I have done nothing but try to end you, hedgehog.]

"Well, things have changed. Besides, I've always believed in second

chances."

[So foolish and naive of you.]

"I couldn't just leave you there for him to-!"

A loud **crashing** sound accompanies a bright flash of light, coming from the bedroom window. Lightning always results in a shock, but for Metal it was mental rather than electrical (disregarding the fact that his brain is electric). It was a jump backwards, and then a stumbling roll onto Sonic's bed. He landed as a heap, almost on top of the speedster's hand which was swiftly pulled back in a similarly surprised state.

"H-Hey, it was just lightning! You're fine…"

Metal felt so wrong. Everything felt shaky and far too erratic for comfort. The jolt of lightning had brought up similar memories of sudden impacts. They were more present than they needed to be. They felt far more vivid than they needed to be. They all hurt, almost as much as it did to look at the other hedgehog's eyes. Eyes full of heartbreak and concern. Eyes that desperately wanted the other to not feel so disturbed, to just be ok. Sonic had said seconds ago that he was fine, but… Was he? Was he?

"Metal?"

No. He wasn't. In an instant his limbs curled inward to a fetal position, arms wrapping around his whole body as the noise began. His 'cries', which felt oh-so-louder and far more distressing, reverberated through the room. His whole being was shaking with his whines, altogether creating an image that made Sonic feel absolutely horrible. He didn't deserve this. Metal didn't deserve any of the pain he's been through, regardless of the fact that he's inflicted pain on the hedgehog before. It wasn't right. It never *ever* was. That earlier vow to make Eggman answer for all of this was cemented now. Maybe it even justified worse actions…?

Sonic wasn't sure. He also wasn't sure of what best way to aid the badnik, which was the more pressing concern. He started to reach out a hand toward Metal, who noticed and lightly put one of his own hands on top. It only lay there for a moment however, as he suddenly reached further to pull the organic's body right up against his, then wrapped his arms tightly around it. Sonic was slightly taken aback by this, but soon let his hand rest around the shivering robot as well. Its sobs continue for a long while, even prompting the blue blur to shed a

few tears of his own in response.

At some point, the bot manages to mutter some sort of desperate plea to himself.

[I can't go back. I can't go back. I can't-]

"You won't. He's not gonna hurt you anymore. I'll make sure of it." Sonic was quick to interject. That man would never lay a finger on Metal ever again. Of course it wouldn't reverse the trauma that is causing him to cry out into his rival's chest seemingly endlessly, but it was necessary for his safety and wellbeing *now,* and that's what mattered. The pain won't ever fully go away, but it can be managed. Processed. Understood. Through all of the sobs that have left a deep pit to form in his chest, Sonic has his mind set in this. Metal Sonic needs to recover. He needs to be himself. He needs to be ok.

He has to be. He just has to be.

Chapter End Notes

byeah

couldnt think of how to progress further so this is where it ends for now. hope yall cried too

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